


LINCOLN SKETCHES

BY

GARRETT NEWKIRK

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LINCOLN LIFE SKETCHES

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In Verse and Prose

BY
GARRETT NEWKIRK



NEW YORK
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1920

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GARRETT NEWKIRK

Printed in the United States of America

Inscribed
to my friend,
Dr. Norman Bridge:
A Lincolnian Patriot

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LINCOLN LIFE SKETCHES

TO THE READER

Washington, D. C.

August 17, 1863.

Hon. James Conkling,
Springfield, Ill.

My Dear Conkling:—

I cannot leave here now. Herewith is a letter
instead. You are one of the best public readers.
I have but one suggestion—read it very slowly.

And now God bless you all.

Yours as ever,

A. LINCOLN.

I

THE MAN-CHILD.

Home of the Pioneer: a house of logs,
Fire-place of stones and clay;
Stick-chimney queer, one southward open door,
For light and cheer of day.

A slender woman, young, in homespun garb,
A man-child bending o'er;
Within a lowly cradle gently rocked,
Upon the earthen floor.

A cradle rude, God's basket, like the ark,
That lay among the reeds
Upon the Nile, filled with a nation's hope,
And promise of great deeds.

II.

BOYHOOD

—“Most potent decade of allotted years”—

Free growth among the wild-flowers, plants and trees,
Music of bird and brook;
Learning of simple things, the helpful task,
With stories from the Book.

A mother-priestess, daily sowing seed
Within a fertile mind;
That, with the quickening touch of future years,
Shall blossom for mankind.

A startling call! the parting word and prayer,
Mid evening shadows dim:
Forever stilled the voice that sang with cheer
The early morning hymn.

BOYHOOD

On this low hill, beneath the native oak,
Is seen a humble mound:
Approach with reverence and uncovered head,
Thou stand'st on holy ground.

III

YOUTH

Twelve growing years, of toilsome labor full:

A towering, stalwart form,
Of fibre knit like ironwood or oak,
To battle with the storm.

Far swings the ax, half circling, through the air;
Cleaves deep the shining blade:
The tree, with loud reverberating crash,
Upon the earth is laid.

Wide sweeps the sickle in his mighty hand,
Out through the standing grain:
Or, like the man of Nazareth he wields
The hammer and the plane.

YOUTH

Few books but choice, read o'er and o'er again,
Before the fagot light;
Or in the Sabbath stillness of the woods,
And *pondered*, day and night.

IV

ADVENTURE

Young manhood's freedom, and desire to see
The city of his dream;
A ship to build along the dock of clay,
And launch upon the stream.

Adown the Mississippi then behold,
Borne by the current free,
A merchant vessel of the western wild,
With woodman sailors three.

Sail on! Thy tall commander at the helm
Holds hard the guiding oar;
And cheers thy crew to laughter and to song,
With echoes from the shore.

V

DISILLUSION

Medley of races in the marts of trade,
Babel of speech and scene :
Lost is the fancied glory when he views
The sordid life and mean.

Beside the market-place for slaves dark-hued,
Of cruel greed the spoil,
He broods despondent on their going forth
"To unrequited toil."

Return, O Son of Freedom! to thy home,
Breathe the pure air again ;
Have faith, the manacles of men shall fall,
Before thy voice and pen.

VI

A CENTURION

Frontiers aflame! Advance the pioneers
O'er prairies wild and wide;
One proud to be the captain of their choice,
Leads on with lengthy stride.

At night, when camp-fire embers wierdly glow,
Beside the Indian trail;
He guiles the gloaming hours with Aesop's lore,
And many a thrilling tale.

The cruel spirit of his thoughtless men
Oft makes his anger burn;
He shields the prisoner from their leveled guns.
With high command and stern.

VII

ILLINOIS.

A State! New born upon the primal soil:

Where honest workmen build
Rough hewn, the walls of freedom and of law,—
Manhood their only guild.

A new arena, where the sons of toil

Contend in homespun mail;
With speech unpolished, of the out-door school,
—Knights of the field and flail.

One towering high in early manhood's prime,

Comes forth within the lists;
Unboastful, but with battle-ax to strike
Wherever wrong exists.

VIII

CHARACTERISTICS

The brave, indomitable heart of him
Is tender to the core;
He hears the grieving bird, and turns aside
Her nestlings to restore.

Unwavering in the love of truth, he grows
Beyond all narrow scope:
Embittered not in spirit by defeat,
Or disappointed hope.

A soul of melancholy shades, yet lit
By humor's kindly rays:
As o'er a mountain dark with clouds of rain
The summer sunshine plays.

IX

GREAT ISSUES

— 1858 —

A lion roused! When freedom yields her line,
Before the whip and goad;
And onward moves the shadow of the slave
Along the Free-Man's road!

Now, with this battle-gage defiant thrown,
Two chosen giants meet;
Truth's champion bears the better lance and shield,—
Victorious in defeat!

Prophetic words ring out, high toned and clear,
Across the waiting land:
“United in the faith that right makes might,
Undaunted we shall stand.”

X

CHOSEN

— 1860 —

Shall we upon the western land, spread forth
Like parchment pure and white,
Out-pour the blot of wicked wrong and shame,
Or laws of freedom write?

Shall prideful caste the tyrant will enforce,
And Conscience still her voice?
The Ballot answers NO! and Wisdom high,
Decrees the Nation's choice:

The man ordained, through fitting years upgrown:
Of marvelous poise and will:
Withheld from lesser honors, long desired,
The highest place to fill.

XI

WAITING

*Elect, yet unempowered, he can but wait;
—Chained to the lingering days;
The while unhindered forces are employed
With parting of the ways.

Enforced to silence misconstrued, he views
The coming danger-tide;
Fed by the rising streams of discontent,
O'er all the Southland wide.

Heard are the mingled voices,—threatenings dire
Of sacrifice and fate,
Inspiring words of courage and of hope:
—Deep undertone of Hate.

* From Nov. 3 to March 4.

WAITING

For those there are with eyes, that will not see,
With ears, that will not hear;
Tho' Moses and the prophets all should speak,
Or Christ Himself appear.

Farewell for aye! to this love-hallowed home
Where all thy sons were born;
Bespeak the prayers of these, thy neighbor-friends,
—Tear-dimmed their eyes this morn.

XII

THE STORM

Columbian skies are ominous and dread,
 With lurid clouds aglare;
Afar the sound of rolling chariot-wheels
 Is borne upon the air.

*One startling flash along the low south-east,
 A shock!—felt 'round the world:
Then forth upon the ether, passion-charged,
 Ten thousand bolts are hurled.

Four years of storm, the struggling Ship of State
 Upon an ocean vast;
Her steadfast Captain standing day and night.
 Unflinching in the blast.

* Sumpter.

XIII

HARVEST OF DEATH

Now brothers of a noble race forget
 Their heritage of birth;
Impelled by fancied wrong, their fathers' flag
 They trample to the earth.

On many a crimson field, the reaper, Death,
 Holds carnival with Pain:
With sickle keen the rider and the horse
 Are heaped upon the plain.

By sunlit palm and snowy pine is heard
 The voice of weeping sore;
The widow and the orphan bow in grief
 For him who comes no more.

XIV

THE BURDEN

O, Man of patience! Watching through the hours
Of days that seem as years;
Upholding, Atlas-like, a very world
Of duties, toils and fears.

Each day the mark for many a cruel shaft
Of foe, or friend unwise;
The while he giveth balm to broken hearts
That plead in lowly guise.

With far prophetic vision calm and sure,
He stays the hand of power;
Till Time's unerring dial points at last
Emancipation's hour.

XV

VICTORIES

*A sunburst! gleaming on a splendid stream,
With victory on the height;
In honor of the Nation's natal day,
Her banners crowned with light.

†A field baptized with blood, and mingled tears
Of gratitude and grief;
Where comes the Man, plain, modest and sincere;
To pay a tribute brief.

* Vicksburg, July 4, '63.

† Gettysburg.

XVI

ADDRESS

In towering height, above the silent throng
 He lifts his dreaming eyes;
Out o'er the consecrated battle-ground,
 Then far to glowing skies:

Now forth upon the listening world he pours
 The feeling of his soul,
In simple, child-like words; to be enshrined
 While centuries onward roll.

XVII

GROUND ARMS!

*Once more on Earth, in fateful Wilderness,
The voice of God is heard:
Like Sinai's thunder sound the embattled guns
That speak the final word.

What hast thou gained, O brothers of the race,
Of thy dead flag and name?
†*For courage noble and surrender brave,*
The high and deathless fame.

Yea more, the infinite blessing of defeat,
Denial of thy goal:
The bane destroyed, and with thy fatherland
A reunited soul.

* Battle of the Wilderness.

† Appomattox.

XVIII

PEACE

New day: Behold the Man!—his face aglow,
Lit by the rising sun:
With benediction and a smile alike
For those who failed or won.

He sees upon the dark, departing cloud,
Bright Hope's prophetic bow;
While o'er the shining hills on either hand
Blue skies are bending low.

He hears the voice of gratitude and praise
Where dusky freedmen throng;
Again the birds are flying from the south
To fill the air with song.

PEACE

Uplifted is the burden, with release
From agonizing care:
The bliss of sleep with only buoyant dreams.
The peace of answered prayer.

XIX

THE STROKE

A fell, demoniac spirit stalks unseen,
His purpose to fulfill:
With fiendish art to blight a sacred home,
And thwart a nation's will.

As out of darkness comes the meteor's gleam,
One moment and away;
Or jungle tiger from his cover close
Springs forth upon his prey,—

So on the man of mighty conscience falls
The dire, malignant blow;
Appalling words are spoken through the land,
In whispers hoarse and low.

XX

THE NATION'S GLOOM

Whene'er of old upon the nooning orb
A full eclipse was thrown,
Men stood appalled, filled with a gruesome dread
Of threatening ills unknown:

So now, the instant cloud of grief appears
To hide the sun and sky,
Black shadows fall o'er every hill and vale,
And ghostly shapes draw nigh.

The smouldering fires of passion, late subdued,
Break hideous forth again;
And fierce Revenge with blazing brand of rage
Would sear the souls of men.

XXI

ANGELS

*But hark! Above discordant sound is heard
The voice of music near;
“The better Angels,” singing as they come,
Disperse the clouds of fear.

And lo! A Scroll, upon the brightening sky,
By unseen hands unrolled;
Whereon his own immortal words are writ,
In characters of gold.

“With love to all and malice toward none,”
—Here Earth and Heaven meet—
“The last full measure of devotion” given,
—*A sacrifice complete.*

* See first “Inaugural.”

ANGELS

*The unburdened Spirit now in larger sphere,
Doth speak with mightier power;
Proclaiming Truth's evangel, Mercy's law,
Till time's remotest hour.*

NOTES

NOTES

I

THE MAN-CHILD

These three verses were published, with illustrations, in *The Outlook Magazine* for February, 1899. Since then, on the spot of his birth the "House of Logs" has been carefully reconstructed, to the extent of material remaining, and a fine memorial building dedicated with appropriate ceremonies to the memory of the "Man-child."

II

BOYHOOD

For Lincoln's own statement of his mother's influence on his life, with particular reference to the religious training of his earlier years, the reader is referred to the work of Henry B. Rankin, of Springfield: "*Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln.*" It is the story of an interview in the Rankin home. He was ten years old lacking four months at the time of her death, which caused him life-long grief.

It was a strange, local disease, not the hardship of

NOTES

pioneer life, that caused her death. The mystery of the so-called "milk-sickness" has never been fully explained.

III

THE YOUTH

Mr. Lincoln, in his Autobiographical letter, passes over this period with these sentences: "I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two." Again: "Somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the rule of three but that was all. The little advance I now have upon this store of education I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

"From my eighth to within my twenty-third year I was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument—the ax." We know that he did also some carpentering and cabinet work.

IV

ADVENTURE

Up to the age of eighteen Abraham had never seen a city,—nothing greater than a backwoods town. New Orleans, 1,400 miles distant by waterways, was the one great market of the West-South country.

NOTES

The first trip was made from Spencer County, Ind., via the Ohio and lower Mississippi, the second from Sangamon County, Ill., via the Sangamon and Illinois rivers, to the upper Mississippi.

V

DISILLUSION

It was on his second visit, three years later, that he was most sorely depressed in spirit by seeing human beings bought and sold like cattle in the slave market. And it was then he is reported to have said: "If I ever get a chance to hit that institution, I'll hit it hard." He was surely despondent, for at that time, 1831, there seemed to be no hope for the abolition of slavery.

VI

A CENTURION

Mr. Lincoln says (in the Fell letter), "Then came the Black Hawk War; and I was elected a Captain of Volunteers, a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since."

It is told that he saved the life of an old Indian

NOTES

who came to the camp with a letter of safe conduct from Gen. Cass. On account of recent outrages on the frontier, the very sight of an Indian infuriated the men.

VII

ILLINOIS

The State was young, just in the making, at the time when the career of Lincoln began. Knights indeed they were, he and his contemporaries;—such men as John Calhoun, E. D. Baker, O. H. Browning, Stephen T. Logan and John T. Stuart. With the two last named he had at different times partnership in law practice.

VIII

CHARACTERISTICS

This was the great period of discipline and development in Mr. Lincoln's life; growing in knowledge, self-confidence and, above all, in the humanities,—sympathy, kindness, and broad charitableness—yet ever courageous and unflinching where principles were at issue. He was in every way continually growing to the measure of the great task that lay before him.

NOTES

That was a little thing, a trifling incident, but how much it meant, when, in company with lawyer-riders on the circuit, he heard the voice of a bird's distress, drew rein and went aside to learn the cause. Discovering that a recent storm had thrown the nestlings to the ground, he found them one by one and carefully replaced them in the nest, then went on to be laughed at by his companions as one too soft-hearted to be in the practice of law.

IX

GREAT ISSUES

Repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Attempt to make of Kansas a slave State. Lincoln wrote to Fell, 1859: "I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri State Compromise aroused me again." Then followed the great debates of the "Two Chosen Giants"—Lincoln and Douglas, in 1858, in the contest for the senatorship of Illinois.

"Victorious in defeat."* In the senatorial contest Lincoln had a majority of the votes cast in Illinois, but owing to an unfair apportionment of the legislative districts, Douglas had a majority of the legislature on joint ballot. Further, the "defeat" in 1858 was preliminary to success in the national election of

* Lincoln stated that the highest ambition of his life had been not to be President, but to serve one full term in the United States Senate.

NOTES

1860. "Right makes might"—close of the Cooper Institute speech, 1860.

X

CHOSEN

The vital issue of the presidential campaign of 1860 was the same as that of the senatorial in Illinois, two years previous. It was in brief, Shall slavery be excluded from the territories,—not yet states and under the control of the General Government? The republican party said positively yes. Both factions of the democratic party opposed this with differing methods of decision. Those of the extreme Southern wing were determined to win or break the Union. It was what Seward had called "The irrepressible conflict." We can hardly escape the conviction that Lincoln was chosen by Divine providence for victorious leadership.

XI

WAITING

The period of four months between the time of Mr. Lincoln's election and inauguration was one of great stress and anxiety. No other President elect has ever experienced anything to compare with it, and no other, probably, could have endured it so wisely and patiently. Many were the hours, we are told, that he

NOTES

sat quietly at home in the old armchair, pondering questions of magnitude, at the same time playing with the boys, taking their "wooling" and teasing with smiles of indulgence. He seemed to realize that he was having possibly the last days of the old home life, and that he should make it as joyous for them as possible. With his brief, pathetic, farewell speech, delivered from the rear platform of the train that was to bear him to Washington, all readers are familiar. It is only second as a classic to the one delivered at Gettysburg.

"*Hate.*" * "Those who will not read or heed what I have already publicly said would not read or heed a repetition of it. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' " Lincoln to Speer. (Complete Works, p. 652.)

XII

THE VITAL CONFLICT

The more one thinks of this four-year period, having been old enough to remember it vividly, the more one feels his inability to express its meaning and pathos in a few verses—or at all.

* "Unhindered forces" of disunion. Mr. Lincoln remarked in his quaint way, that he would have liked to get down to Washington in time to shut the gate before the horse was stolen, but "reckoned he could find his tracks."

NOTES

XIII

THE HARVEST OF DEATH

The struggle was fearful, the loss great, of both armies, with corresponding grief in the homes South and North.

“By sunlit palm and snowy pine.”

In proportion to the population North and South the loss of life was thirty times greater than that of the U. S. Armies oversea in 1918-19.

XIV

THE BURDEN

How we have all sympathized with him, over and over again, as we have read of his anxiety and agony of spirit for the woe and suffering of it all; and in the midst the loss of his own dear boy!

And how maligned, censured, insultingly cartooned was he; oftentimes misunderstood by the earnestly well meaning: yet ever the “*man of patience.*”

XV

VICTORIES—TURN OF THE TIDE

Gettysburg, July 3. Vicksburg, July 4th. History records no other two nearly simultaneous victories

NOTES

that wrought such immediate confidence and faith in the ultimate triumph of a cause. All lovers of the Union felt that though it might be delayed the end was sure.

XVI

THE ADDRESS

It contains 265 words, and may be read easily in two and one-half minutes. One hundred and eighty-seven words are of one syllable; 52 words have each two syllables. Sixteen remaining spaces are filled by thirteen words, three being repeated—"devotion," "dedicate" and "dedicated." The remaining ten are "Government," "continent," "created," "consecrate," "consecrated," "remaining," "altogether," "proposition," "unfinished" and "Liberty," seven of three, and three of four syllables each. No word admits a substitute. The address has been oft criticized, but nobody has suggested a possible change that would not diminish its value.

XVII

GROUND ARMS

"In the wilderness." For the most remarkable description ever written of the closing scenes of the conflict ending with Appomattox, the reader is re-

NOTES

ferred to a book entitled "The Sunset of the Confederacy," by Gen. Morris Schaff, U. S. A. No lover of prose-poetry can afford to miss it. This is without intention to disparage the stories of Gen. Horace Porter, Gen. Grant and others—all excellent.

XVIII

VISION OF PEACE

The happiest days of Mr. Lincoln's life were undoubtedly his last, and for this we may be ourselves glad and thankful. Words are powerless to describe the joy of peace that came, all over the land, south as well as north.

XIX

THE STROKE

This was America's first experience of the assassination of one in high office. All were for the moment unnerved. War veterans were overcome with poignant grief. "Men wept who never wept before."

XX

A NATION'S GLOOM

The most dismal, awful day in American history

NOTES

was the one following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The people were simply heartbroken. Many were furious, thinking wrongly that it represented the spirit of the entire South.

XXI

THE "ANGELS"

"Better Angels of our nature." See concluding sentence of the first inaugural address. It is cause for gratitude that the "angels" did so soon reassert their supremacy over the American people, subduing the spirit of violence and revenge.

BRIEF CLASSICS

BRIEF CLASSICS

FAREWELL ADDRESS AT SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

Feb. 11, 1861

“My Friends: No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived more than a quarter of a century. Here my children were born, and here one of them lies buried. I now leave, not knowing when or if ever I may return, with a task before me greater possibly than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail.

Trusting in Him who can go with me and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.”

BRIEF CLASSICS

CLOSE OF THE FIRST INAUGURAL ADDRESS

March 4, 1861

“In your hands, my fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one ‘to preserve, protect and defend it.’

“I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every loving heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as they surely will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

BRIEF CLASSICS

CLOSING PARAGRAPH OF A THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION

July 15, 1863

“Now, therefore, be it known that I do set apart Thursday, the 6th day of August next, to be observed as a day for national thanksgiving, praise and prayer; and I invite the people of the United States to assemble on that occasion in their customary places of worship, and in the forms approved by their own consciences, render the homage due to the Divine Majesty for the wonderful things he has done in the nation’s behalf, and invoke the influence of his Holy Spirit to subdue the anger which has produced and so long sustained a needless and cruel rebellion; to change the hearts of the insurgents, to guide the counsels of the Government with wisdom adequate to so great a national emergency, and to visit with tender care and consolation throughout the length and breadth of our land all those who, through the vicissitudes of marches, voyages, battles and sieges have been brought to suffer in mind, body or estate, and finally to lead the whole nation through paths of repentance and submission to the Divine Will back to the perfect enjoyment of union and fraternal peace.”

BRIEF CLASSICS

THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS Nov. 19, 1863

“*Fourscore* and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

BRIEF CLASSICS

CLOSE OF THE SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS

March 4, 1865

“Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, that ‘the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.’

“With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

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